

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Calls for Libya's Qadhafi to Leave Power Now

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama calls on Libya's leader, Muammar Qadhafi, to leave power now, saying that he and his government must be held accountable for violating the human rights and brutalization of the Libyan people.

In speaking with German Chancellor Angela Merkel on February 26, Obama shared his deep concern about the Libyan government's continued violation of human rights and brutal treatment of the Libyan people and said the use of violence against the Libyan people calls into question the legitimacy of Qadhafi's rule, the White House said.

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton further amplified the president's position, saying that it is clear the Libyan people want Qadhafi out of power.

"We have always said that the Qadhafi government's future is a matter for the Libyan people to decide, and they have made themselves clear," Clinton said February 26. "When a leader's only means of staying in power is to use mass violence against his own people, he has lost the legitimacy to rule and needs to do what is right for his country by leaving now."

"Qadhafi has lost the confidence of his people and he should go without further bloodshed and violence," she added.

It is the first time that Obama administration officials have directly called on Qadhafi to step down from his 42 years in power. The call comes as the United States has imposed new financial and travel sanctions on Qadhafi, his regime and his family along with 10 of his closest supporters and associates.

Libya has been seized with civil strife that began with a nonviolent revolt against the government on February 15. Now most of the eastern half of the North African nation, which faces the Mediterranean Sea and is bordered by Tunisia and Egypt, is under control of rebelling Libyans, but street fighting and protests have spread to the borders of the Libyan capital city, Tripoli.

Clinton is leaving on February 27 for Geneva, where she will confer with foreign ministers from the European Union, Russia and other powers — including envoys from Arab and African nations — on further actions. She will make a speech February 28 before the U.N. Human Rights Council on the worsening crisis in Libya and status of its

government. It will be the first time that a U.S. secretary of state has addressed the Human Rights Council.

Before leaving for Geneva, Clinton also held consultations by telephone with EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and other European allies.

U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon will visit the White House February 28 for talks with Obama. Obama also spoke with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and other leaders during the day on February 25.

Obama told reporters February 25 that the "Libyan government's continued violation of human rights, brutalization of its people, and outrageous threats have rightly drawn the strong and broad condemnation of the international community."

The United States has imposed specific visa bans on senior Libyan officials and their families and will reject any new visa applications from them. A freeze has been imposed on all Libyan assets in the United States that belong to Qadhafi, his government, four children and associates. The United States has also closed its embassy in Tripoli and suspended some limited defense trade between the two nations.

Obama said that the United States "will stand steadfastly with the Libyan people in their demand for universal rights, and a government that is responsive to their aspirations. Their human dignity cannot be denied."

U.N. SANCTIONS

The U.N. Security Council voted 15-0 on February 26 to impose political and financial sanctions on Qadhafi, his supporters and his government in a move intended to impose immediate measures to stop the violence, ensure accountability and provide humanitarian assistance to the Libyan people.

Additionally, the U.N. Security Council measure is the first unanimous resolution that refers the case of "heinous human rights violations to the International Criminal Court," says U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice.

"It's very significant that the council has acted so swiftly, and in unanimity around what are some outrageous and heinous crimes that are being committed by the government of Libya against its own people," Rice told reporters following the Security Council action. "Those who slaughter civilians will be held personally accountable."

The U.N. sanctions also impose a strong arms embargo and takes steps against the use of mercenaries by the Libyan government to attack its own people, Rice told

reporters.

Secretary Clinton on Holding Qadhafi Government Accountable

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman

For Immediate Release
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STATEMENT BY SECRETARY CLINTON

Holding the Qadhafi Government Accountable

The United States strongly condemns the ongoing violence and human rights violations committed by the government of Libya against its own people. As President Obama said, these actions violate international norms and every standard of common decency. They must stop.

We are moving quickly on a series of steps to hold the Libyan government accountable for its violation of human rights and to mobilize a strong response from the international community.

Last night the United States took action to limit the ability of senior officials of the Qadhafi regime to travel. As Secretary of State, I signed an order directing the Department to revoke U.S. visas held by these officials, others responsible for human rights violations in Libya, and their immediate family members. As a matter of policy, new visa applications will be denied.

This step followed President Obama's Executive Order freezing assets and imposing financial sanctions on members of the regime responsible for abuses against their own people and the suspension of the very limited defense trade we have had with Libya, including pending sales of spare military parts and other licenses allowing private companies to sell military equipment there.

The United States is also working with our friends and partners to mobilize a strong and unified response from the international community to hold accountable the perpetrators of these unacceptable violations of universal human rights. This afternoon I continued close consultations with our European allies, including EU High Representative Catherine Ashton. Negotiations are underway at the United Nations Security Council on a resolution that would impose new sanctions and restrictions. On Monday, I will meet with a number of counterparts in Geneva and address the UN Human Rights Council, which on Friday recommended suspending Libya's membership. We are also working with partners to determine how to provide humanitarian assistance to those in need. Consistent with the

President's guidance, we will continue to look at the full range of options to hold the Libyan government accountable and support the Libyan people.

We have always said that the Qadhafi government's future is a matter for the Libyan people to decide, and they have made themselves clear. When a leader's only means of staying in power is to use mass violence against his own people, he has lost the legitimacy to rule and needs to do what is right for his country by leaving now. Moammar Qadhafi has lost the confidence of his people and he should go without further bloodshed and violence. The Libyan people deserve a government that is responsive to their aspirations and that protects their universally recognized human rights.

Young American Blogger Discusses Social Media's Power for Change

By M. Scott Bortot
Staff Writer

Washington — Blogger Zerlina Maxwell may live in America, but when Hosni Mubarak resigned as president of Egypt, it felt like she was in Cairo.

"I think that social media allowed me, someone who is sitting in New Jersey with a computer, to experience that moment as if I were there," Maxwell said.

On February 17, Maxwell spoke with 25 students at the U.S. Consulate's American Studies Resource Center in An-Najah National University in Nablus — the largest university in the Palestinian Territories' West Bank — via digital video conference for a State Department dialogue on "Promoting Social Media as a Means for Change."

Maxwell discussed the various forms of social media, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and how these mediums can be and have been used as a platform for personal expression and as vehicles for social change. She also highlighted Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's message on Internet freedom, particularly her discussion of the impact of social media on recent events in the Middle East, efforts by some countries to control access to social media and the importance of safeguarding tolerance and freedom of expression.

Maxwell, a student at Rutgers University Law School, is an aspiring professional blogger and social media expert. Obsessed with politics and current events, Maxwell writes primarily for TheLoop21.com, a website that "offers insight, resources and opinions on African-American issues."

For her, events in Iran and now in Egypt highlight the role social media plays in organizing movements for change.

"I think it shows the power of social media. In environments where all traditional media is blocked by regimes, social media is used by the people," Maxwell said. "It is a modern-day version of how they used to organize during the civil rights movement. ... It is an incarnation for 2011."

A self-proclaimed "political junkie," Maxwell campaigned actively for President Obama in 2008. She said a major part of Obama's campaign strategy was using social network sites to organize volunteers and reach potential voters.

Despite the power of Facebook and Twitter, Maxwell said they are the tools, not the architects, of change.

"Social media doesn't bring about change. But it allows for the people who want to create the change to organize," Maxwell said. "I don't think that Twitter is going to make a revolution happen but it can allow the people that want to create a revolution to pick a time and location."

Twitter's groundbreaking way of communicating is comparable to the emergence of radio and television, Maxwell said.

"With the Iranian elections, with the use of hashtags [a way to provide additional information in a tweet] to organize those events on Twitter, you are seeing a student at a university in Tehran tweet about somebody barging in his door with a gun right when it is happening," Maxwell said.

For bloggers, Twitter is a powerful tool to track the movement of ideas across the blogosphere.

"Before Twitter, when you blogged you weren't really sure if people were reacting to it or reading it, but if you blog and you link to it on Twitter, then you get instant feedback," Maxwell said. "And by following other people in the media and blogosphere, you are able to make connections and network."

In recent years, bloggers have become regulars on television because their viewpoints are being noticed.

"I've seen people go from 'I'm just a blogger' to being on CNN or MSNBC because they wrote something, a producer saw it, liked it, and wanted to go further with that story," Maxwell said.

A paralegal by day and a law student by night, Maxwell spends her free time writing for blogs, or thinking about topics. A member of the New Leaders Council, an organization that trains and supports political entrepreneurs, Maxwell is planning innovative ways to

combine her education with her passion for blogging.

"I'm getting a law degree, but I definitely don't necessarily want to go into practicing law. I think that the degree is to give me a level of versatility," she said. "But my focus is to use my writing, whether it be in the realm of politics or promoting women's rights."

A Palestinian undergraduate student who participated in the video conference, intrigued by Maxwell's presentation on social media, asked how to start her own blog. For people interested in blogging, Maxwell provides insight on how to get started in the social media world.

"You have to start writing," Maxwell said, adding that Blogger and WordPress are good places to open an account. "If you are a political blogger, usually you are going to be expressing your opinion about a certain news event and giving your own voice and your own angle."

Along with a blog, Maxwell suggests people who want their voice heard online should also open a Twitter account. And for those less inclined to write, Maxwell thinks YouTube might be a better option.

"A lot of people choose to use video blogging instead of writing it down," Maxwell said. "Instead of writing paragraphs, you can speak and say whatever is on your mind, and I think that is another really powerful way to express an opinion."

Although social media is still a fairly new concept for many Palestinians in the West Bank, especially among those living outside a major urban area like Ramallah, the students at An-Najah were eager to discover ways in which networking tools like Facebook, Twitter and Youtube can be used to inform their global peers.

U.S. Team Helps in Search for New Zealand Quake Survivors

By Charlene Porter
Staff Writer

Washington — A U.S. search-and-rescue team is on the scene in Christchurch, New Zealand, hoping more survivors can be pulled from the city's rubble, even as the time elapsed since the February 22 earthquake diminishes hope.

New Zealand police put the death toll at 113 late February 25. Seventy people have been found alive in the days since the 6.3-magnitude quake. More than 200 people are still thought to be missing.

The U.S. team — flown in from the Los Angeles County Fire Department — arrived in Christchurch February 24, deployed as part of the Disaster Assistance Response

Team that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) keeps on standby at all times to help when catastrophe strikes anywhere in the world.

"Our [search-and-rescue] team will join forces with ... personnel from New Zealand and other international teams they train with all year to assure that every place a survivor might be found is thoroughly searched," wrote USAID press officer Rebecca Gustafson in a blog post from Christchurch.

Gustafson said members of the Los Angeles team worked in the recovery effort after Haiti's 2010 earthquake.

One of the United States' top officials in the field of emergency management, Tim Manning, was in Christchurch at the time of the temblor, participating in a meeting on emergency management issues. Manning is the deputy administrator for protection and national preparedness at the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Manning came into the federal government with almost two decades of frontline emergency management experience as a firefighter, emergency medical technician, rescue mountaineer and hazardous materials specialist. He was on hand when the Los Angeles team arrived and was involved in its initial deployment and search operations.

Members of the U.S. Embassy staff in Wellington are also in Christchurch, helping American travelers and international students in the replacement of lost documents and evacuation.

The earthquake is rattling families well beyond New Zealand. One severely damaged building, the Canterbury Television headquarters, also housed an international education program. Officials said late February 25 that little hope remained that people might be pulled alive from the debris there, or from the Christchurch Cathedral. Japanese, Chinese and Filipino students were enrolled in the international school and are feared dead.

"While we must try to remain positive," Police Commissioner Howard Broad said, "the scale of work and trauma we have yet to confront cannot be underestimated."

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